

***Shchedryk* by Mykola Leontovych: the Centenary of the Ukrainian Masterpiece**

The choral singing is the unique phenomenon of Ukrainian musical life from past to present time, it is widely cultivated. Ukrainian folk songs became source for many choral works of professional composers, as an object of this article – *Shchedryk*, which became the most prominent representants of Ukrainian singing soul all around the world.

Shchedryk (Ukrainian: Щедрик) is known to the English-speaking world and has been identified over the years by several titles: as the *Carol of the Bells* or *Ring, Christmas Bells* or *The Ukrainian Bell Carol*.¹ Extremely popular song *Carol of the Bells* worthy of inclusion in the holiday canon has become a piece of music for Christmas. It is one of the most frequently performed Christmas tunes and is recognized for repeating four-note motif, which contains exceptional energy of even rhythmic rotation. This original archetype within one and a half tone is universal over the historical artistic sense. It is perceived as a magic formula that hypnotizes the recipient due to the continuous repetition of a motif.

But not all listeners and performers know that this Christmas carol has Ukrainian origin, it was created by Ukrainian people as a folk chant and arranged into a highly original **choral miniature work** by the famous Ukrainian composer, choral conductor and teacher Mykola (Nicolas) Leontovych (Ukrainian: Микола Леонтович) (1877–1921).



Fig. 1: Mykola Leontovych (1877–1921)

This consistently gorgeous song has an interesting and complex story of creating.

Shchedryk is an ancient Ukrainian folk song, classified as a pre-Christian New Year's chant welcoming spring without religious content. This work embodied the pantheistic beliefs of ancient Ukrainians. It is significant that archaically plain four notes motif from *Shchedryk* (maybe from Trypillia) is one of the oldest its roots date back to ancient times. It appeared earlier than a verbal text. It sounds like one of the

¹ William D. Crump, *Encyclopedia of New Year's Holidays Worldwide*, Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 2008, p. 50.

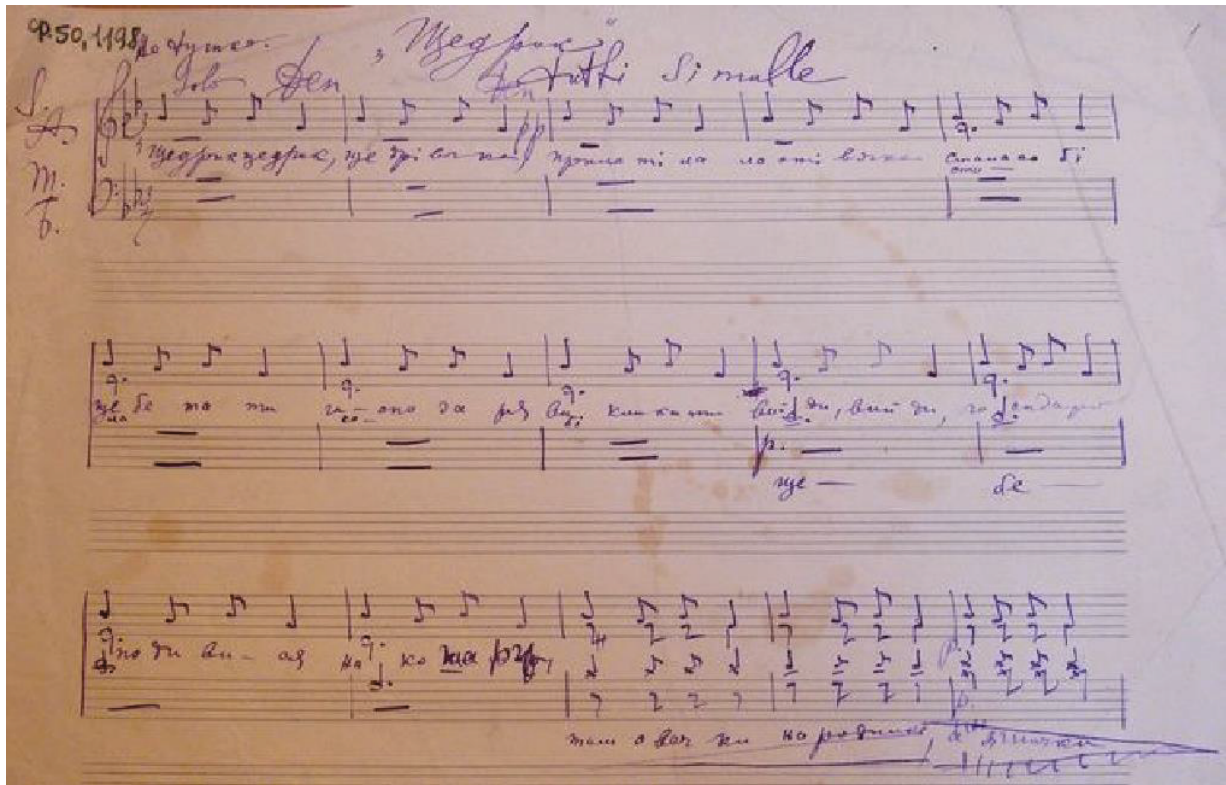


Fig. 2: Autograph of Shchedryk by Mykola Leontovych (it is kept in the Institute of Manuscripts at the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine).

oldest intonation of invocation and hardly be called a melody in the common sense.

Until the Middle Ages the Ukrainians New Year celebrated twice: as astronomical in January, and as agricultural in March.² So in pre-Christian Ukraine farmers counting of calendar New Year feted with the coming of spring in March. The old Ukrainian proverb says: like start to the year so spend it. Therefore in ancient times Ukrainians began New Year with prayers, singing of songs with symbolism in the New Year's wishing of generous life. With the introduction of Christianity to Ukraine and the adoption of the Julian calendar the celebration of the New Year was moved from March to January.

Shchedrivky – ceremonial folk melodies of pagan origin initially sung as a New Year's Eve songs which formerly was celebrated in Ukraine on January 13 (the Old New Year by the Old Style Calendar) in accordance with the Julian calendar. Ukrainian New Year obtained the name *Generous Eve* (Ukrainian: Щедрий вечір) or *Malanka*. Its roots can be traced to the ancient, pre-Christian times. On this night carolers went from house to house singing traditional Ukrainian carols (*Shchedrivky*), acting out a small plays (Goat guiding), predicting good fortune, wishing to the family all the best, namely abundant

² And not in April, as it is indicated in many sources. The ancient Slavs beginning of the New Year associated with the coming of spring, and March – with the beginning of agricultural works.

harvest, welfare, issue of cattle, swarming of bees etc. A poetic word in *Shchedrivky* played the magic duty.

As to the 15th century New Year was celebrated on Kyivan Rus on March 1 (with the return of swallows), *Shchedrivky* executed the functions of *Vesnianka*. They began a spring cycle that is why in *Shchedrivky* there are a lot mentions about swallows, cuckoos: A little swallow flew, Ouch, grey-headed cuckoo etc. In addition the swallow was perceived at that time as a herald of spring coming. It is important that the word *Shchedryk* in the Ukrainian language means the bird *European serin* or just *serin* (*Serinus serinus* of *Passeriformes*), which is the smallest European species of the family of finches (*Fringillidae*), thus the song of this bird is a buzzing trill. Serin arrived nesting into Ukraine at the end of March, when New Year in pre-Christian times was celebrated.

Nowadays *Shchedryk* is perceived as a Christmas hymn though the original Ukrainian lyrics make no reference to Christmas, it's an original „well-wishing song“:³ it describes a swallow bringing cheerful tidings, tweeting about imminent good fortune, flying into a household and calling on a master, singing of wealth that will come with the following spring, proclaiming the plentiful year that the family will have and anticipating a prosperous year. The song's title *Shchedryk* is derived from the word „shchedryj“ which in the Ukrainian language means „the generous one“, „bountiful“:

Щедрик, щедрик, щедрівочка,
Прилетіла ластівочка,
Стала собі щебетати,
Господаря викликати:
„Вийди, вийди, господарю,
Подивися на кошару, –
Там овечки покотились,
А ягнички народились.
В тебе товар весь хороший,
Будеш мати мірку грошей,
Хоч не гроші, то полова,
В тебе жінка чорноброва“.
Щедрик, щедрик, щедрівочка,
Прилетіла ластівочка.

Shchedryk, Shchedryk, a Shchedrivka,
A little swallow flew [into the household]
and started to twitter,
to summon the master:
„Come out, come out, O Master [of the household].
Look at the sheep pen,
there the ewes are nestling
and the lambkin have been born.
Your goods [livestock] are great
you will have a lot of money, [by selling them]
If not money, then chaff.
You have a dark eye-browed wife“.
Shchedryk, Shchedryk, a Shchedrivka,
A little swallow flew.

The melody of *Shchedryk* in Ukrainian musical culture has another verbal version „Oh, on the River, in the Jordan“ (*Ой, на річці, на Ордані*) which in December 1916 in the village Palanka Haysyn district in Podolia recorded Leontovych's friend, the teacher of singing from Tulchyn F. Lototsky:⁴

³ Songs like that are still performed in Ukraine by carolers going door-to-door on the eve of the Julian New Year.

⁴ Valentyna Kuzyk „'Shchedryk' analiz-stretta“ [„Shchedryk“ analysis-stretta], in: *Narodna tvorchist ta etnoloigiya* [Folk Studies and Ethnology], Kyiv, No 1, 2013, p. 43.

Ой на річці, на Ордані
Там Пречиста ризи прала.
Свого Сина сповивала.

Oh, on the River, in the Jordan
There Blessed Virgin chasubles washed.
His son swaddled.

Прилетіли три янголи,
Взяли Йсуса на небеса
А небеса ростворились
Всі святії поклонились.

Three angels flew,
Took Jesus to heaven
As the heavens opened
All the saints bowed.

Ой на річці, на Ордані
Слава в небі і на землі.
Радість прийшла: Син божий днесь
Бог спасіння всім нам приніс.

Oh, on the River, in the Jordan
Glory in heaven and on earth.
Joy came: the Son of God this day
The God of salvation for all of us brought.

Прилетіли три янголи,
„Алилуя“ заспівали
А небеса ростворились
Всі святії поклонились.

Three angels flew,
„Hallelujah“ sang
As the heavens opened
All the saints bowed.

This text version in the 1980s was presented by the famous Ukrainian choir-master and scholar Mstyslav Yurchenko (*1951) with a chamber choir „Renaissance“ (*Відродження*). This piece has become an integral part of the repertoire of other Ukrainian choirs: „Kyiv“ (*Kuïv*), „Khreshchatyk“ (*Хрещатик*), „Vydubychi“ (*Вудубичі*), „Anima“ (*Аніма*), „Favor“ (*Фавор*) and others.⁵ This variant is characterized by the same tempo, rhythm, agogics and dynamics as in *Shchedryk*.⁶

In the context of the article it is worth briefly examine the biography of Mykola Leontovych. He was born in the Monastyrok community, near the village of Selevyntsi, in the Podolia region of Ukraine. His father, grandfather, and great grandfather were village priests, so Leontovych grew up in a highly religious atmosphere. Leontovych received his first musical lessons from his father, Dmytro Leontovych, who was skilled at singing and playing the violin, cello, double bass, harmonium, guitar and directed a school choir. Leontovych was educated as a priest in the Kamianets-Podilskyi Theological Seminary (1892–1899), which both his father and grandfather had attended. At the seminary he studied music theory, ancient Ukrainian chants and folk melodies, and started writing choral arrangements. Leontovych after graduating from the Seminary has broken the family tradition by becoming a music teacher instead of a priest.

Later he furthered his musical education at the Saint Petersburg Court Capella, where he earned his credentials as a choirmaster of church choruses, and private lessons with the famous musicologist Boleslav Yavorsky (1877–1942), whom he over twelve years (from 1909) periodically visited

⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

⁶ <http://www.parafia.org.ua/piece/oj-na-richtsi-na-jordani-2/scores/>

in Kyiv and Moscow. Leontovych worked as a teacher of music, also at the Kyiv Conservatory and the Mykola Lysenko Institute of Music and Drama in Tulchyn, where he taught vocal and instrumental music at the Tulchyn Eparchy Women's college to the daughters of village priests took charge of a local organization called „Prosvita“ (meaning „Enlightenment“), started the city's first music school.

During his lifetime, Leontovych taught at various schools, organized choirs, amateur orchestras, concert bands. He was one of the organizers of the first Ukrainian State Orchestras, participated in the founding of the Ukrainian Republic Capella.⁷ He was active both as a conductor and as a composer. Sadly, Mykola Leontovych was murdered by a Soviet agent Afanasy Gryshchenko⁸ during the night of January 22–23, 1921 at the home of his parents, whom he was visiting for the Orthodox Feast of the Nativity (December, 25 of the Julian calendar, which on the Gregorian calendar falls in January). The assassination happened because Leontovych was suspected by the Soviet government in a secret nationalist activities and taking part in the independent national-revolutionary movement, which revealed in the years 1917–1921, aimed at promoting Ukraine as a sovereign state. Besides, the Soviet government wasn't satisfied of Leontovych's pro-Ukrainian position.

Leontovych's music was inspired by the founder of the Ukrainian national music school Mykola Lysenko,⁹ whom he dedicated his two compilations of

⁷ Ukrainian Republic Capella (reorganized in 1920 into the Ukrainian National Choir (or Chorus)) was founded in Kyiv in early 1919 by Oleksander Koshyts and Kyrylo Stetsenko (1882–1922), aided by the head of the Ukrainian National Republic Symon Petliura (1879–1926). Its task was popularizing and promoting Ukrainian musical culture in major cultural centers in the West. Capella consisted of 80 members in a mixed choir and was directed and conducted by Koshyts. In February 1919 Capella toured through Austria, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Holland, Czech, Poland, Spain, England, and Germany. Koshyts with some of the choristers decided to stay abroad after the fall of the Ukrainian National Government and the coming of the Bolsheviks. In July 1920 in Berlin Capella was disbanded, its members formed three separate choirs. The main group, led by Koshyts, was reconstituted in Warsaw as the Ukrainian National Choir. Late in 1921 it began a tour through France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, and the USA, where from October 1922 to March 1923 it performed in more than 100 concerts, then followed a tour to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Cuba, Canada, Mexico and California. In 1924, after having staged about 900 concerts, the Ukrainian National Choir was disbanded. A multilingual collection of reviews of Ukrainian National Choir performances from this period was printed in Paris in 1929 as *Ukrainian Song Abroad* (Українська пісня за кордоном). The repertoire of the Capella was based on works by M. Lysenko, K. Stetsenko, O. Koshyts and M. Leontovych. One of the most popular pieces was Leontovych's *Shchedryk*.

⁸ The name of killer of a composer was declassified in archives only in 1990th, in the period of independent Ukraine.

⁹ Mykola (Nicolas) Lysenko (Ukrainian: Микола Лисенко) (1842–1912) was an outstanding Ukrainian composer, pianist, conductor, public figure. After graduating from the Leipzig Conservatoire he had an opportunity to remain abroad and to make the career of a brilliant pianist. But he came back to his country and devoted himself fully to the development of the Ukrainian music art. M. Lysenko collected more than folk 700 songs. Lysenko's creation covers all forms and genres, he wrote nine

songs from Podolia. Leontovych is known for choral music, he strongly developed Ukrainian choral tradition. His musical heritage consists primarily of more than 150 choral works. Most of the choral harmonisations of the folk songs Leontovych limited to one couplet. His earlier works consist mainly of strophic arrangements of folk songs, in later years Leontovych developed a strophic-variation form strongly related to the text.

Composer created a lot of choral music *a cappella* (*The roosters are singing* (Піють півні), *A mother had one daughter* (Мала мати одну дочку), *Little Dudka player* (Дударик), *Oh, the star has risen* (Ой зійшла зоря), *Icebreaker* (Льодолом), *Summer Tones* (Літні тони), *Playing Rabbit* (Гра в зайчика) and others), cantatas, choral compositions set to the words of various Ukrainian poets, unfinished opera *On the Mermaid's Easter Day*¹⁰ (На русалчин Великдень), was the first attempt at a Ukrainian fantastic opera. Leontovych as a composer with a professional theological education liked spiritual music, he is known for his Liturgy, composed in the vernacular (premiered in 1919), for religious works *On the Resurrection of Christ* (На воскресіння Христа), *Praise the name of the Lord* (Хваліте ім'я Господнє), *Oh quiet light* (Світе тихий) and others. Apart from his particularly renowned choral miniatures *Shchedryk* and *Dudaryk*, Leontovych's music became the basis of the repertoire of many choirs of Ukraine it influenced Ukrainian composers of succeeding generations.

Shchedryk was premiered on December 26, 1916 by the student choir of the Kyiv University of Saint Wolodymyr under the leadership of Oleksander Koshyts.¹¹

operas (among them *Natalka Poltavka*, *Eneida*, *Taras Bulba* etc.), a series of big vocal and symphonic works, many vocal compositions (among them the cycle *Kobzar*), piano and chamber music.

¹⁰ Leontovych had finished only the first of three acts of the opera *On the Mermaid's Easter Day*, based on Borys Hrinchenko's fairy tale, rest remained sketched out. Later Ukrainian composers Mykhajlo Verykivsky (1896–1962) and Myroslav Skoryk (*1938) had completed and edited the opera that premiered in 1977 at the Kyiv Opera and Ballet Theatre, one hundred years after Leontovych's birth. The North American premiere took place on April 11, 2003 in Toronto.

¹¹ Oleksander Koshyts (also spelled as Alexander Koshetz; Ukrainian: Олександр Кошиць) (1875–1944) – a famous Ukrainian choral conductor, arranger, composer, ethnographer, promoter of Ukrainian musical culture around the world. As Leontovych he grew up in a highly religious atmosphere: his father, grandfather, and great grandfather were village priests. In 1901 he graduated from the Kiev Theological Academy, studied composition at the Mykola Lysenko Institute of Music and Drama (1908–10), taught choral classes at the Kyiv's Conservatory. At that period Koshyts conducted the choir *Bojan*, organized two student choirs (one consisting of students from Kyiv University, the other of students of the Higher Courses for Women), conducted the orchestra of Sadovsky's Theater (1912–16), served as conductor and choirmaster of the Kyiv Opera House (1916–17). Koshyts was the co-founder and conductor of the Ukrainian Republic Capella, which toured Europe and the Americas in 1919–1924 and 1926–27. Capella was based primarily in New York City and Winnipeg, Manitoba. The song repertoire of the Koshyts's choir has got without exaggeration all-American spread. Koshyts documented the Capella's travels in the memoir *With Song, Around the World* (З піснєю через світ), published in 1947–48 in two volumes and then reprinted in 1995. It was Koshyts who introduced



Fig. 3: Oleksander Koshyts (Alexander Koshetz) (1875–1944)

It brought Leontovych tremendous acclaim and great success from the public in Kyiv. To Western audiences *Shchedryk* was introduced by the Ukrainian National Choir during its concert tour of Europe and the Americas. After concerts in Paris in January 1921, scholars of the St. Ludwig's Vocal School translated *Shchedryk* and other works from Ukrainian into French and performed them with their chorus. Admitting the sound technique of the French, Koshyts still preferred performances of these works in their original form.¹²

Shchedryk was premiered in the United States on October 5, 1921 at a concert venue Carnegie Hall in New York City. From this date a little swallow from *Shchedryk* began its world journey. In his memoirs *With Song, Around the World* Koshyts recalled, that *Shchedryk* was the most successful item, a „corona point“ of the repertoire on extensive

tours, it received the highest appreciations of musical critics.¹³ The first recording of *Shchedryk* was made from September 26 to October 6, 1922 on the record company *Brunswick Records*.¹⁴

Choral miniature *Shchedryk* is based on traditional Ukrainian four-note motif, which Leontovych knew since his childhood because it was sung in Podolia. Its words, recorded by researchers in the town of Krasnopil Zhytomyr district of Volyn region, Leontovych took from an anthology of Ukrainian folk songs collected by K. Polischchuk and M. Ostapovych¹⁵ (about it wrote a

Leontovych's *Shchedryk* to the Ukrainian (1916), European (1920, 1921) and American (1921) audience. As Leontovych, Koshyts collected Ukrainian folk songs (in the Kyiv region (1893–1900) and in the Kuban (1903–1905), re-arranged them, composed a lot of religious music, including 5 Liturgies, published a number of collections and musical studies. Koshyts emigrated from Ukraine in 1922 and settled in New York City in 1926, worked in the USA and Canada (1941–1944, Winnipeg) as a teacher of choir conducting. In the Soviet period, Koshyts's name and his works were taboo in Ukraine.

¹² Roman Sawycky, “Carol of the bells”, in: *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Edition Svoboda), December 19, 1976, No. 49 (250), Vol. LXXXIII, Part 1, p. 7.

¹³ Oleksander Koshyts, *Z pisneyu cherez svit: podorozh Ukrainskoi respublikanskoi kapely* / ed. by Mykhailo Holovashchenko [With Song, Around the World: trip of Ukrainian Republic Capella], Kyiv 1998, p. 67.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁵ *Zbirnyk najkrashchyyh ukrainskyh pisen z notamy: zibrav K. Polishchuk, noty zapysav M. Ostapovych. Knyhy 1–4*. [A Collection of the Best Ukrainian Songs with Notes: collected by K. Polishchuk, notes recorded by M. Ostapovych], Book 4, Kyiv, No 23, 1913, p. 18.



Fig. 4: The Ukrainian National Choir (March 1921)

music critic and a researcher of Leontovych's creativity Ya. Yurmas (Yuri Masyutun; Ukrainian: Юрій Масютин, 1896–1942).¹⁶ Work on *Shchedryk* composer began in 1910 as a task for mastery of polyphonic technique ostinato given by his private teacher B. Yavorsky.¹⁷ The manuscript of *Shchedryk* sent to Koshyts was dated August 18, 1916.¹⁸ Consequently, over *Shchedryk* composer had been working for six years.

The original work is written for the mixed four-voice choir *a cappella* soprano–alto–tenor–bass. *Shchedryk* departs from the simple setting of folk songs and constitutes Leontovych's the most original and artistic compositions. It is built on a repeated four-note pattern built on the interval of the minor third. Moreover, in the Leontovych's miniature this motif is repeated ostinato in all voices according to the principle *Perpetuum mobile* 68 times (!). As Prof. Roman Sawycky noticed,

The composer developed the motif's basic traits, made an 'enlargement' of the little original at the same time defining its rhythmic and melodic properties more distinctly. But in the same process the composer provided completely new values of polyphonic voicing and harmony typical of himself resulting in a unique combination of ancient and modern musical thinking.¹⁹

In *Shchedryk* an important role being played by vocal polyphony, including using of polyphonic ostinato, variation principle, vocal instrumentation, imitation techniques, when a solo voice starts the song and the rest of the voices of the choir gradually join in, interpreting every new strophe differently. It is notably that a four-note pattern composer didn't transform from

¹⁶ Valentyna Kuzyk „Shchedryk“ analiz-stretta” [„Shchedryk“ analysis-stretta], in: *Narodna tvorchist ta etnoloigiya* [Folk Studies and Ethnology], Kyiv, No 1, 2013, p. 42.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Roman Sawycky, “Carol of the bells”, in: *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Edition Svoboda), December 19, 1976, No. 49 (250), Vol. LXXXIII, Part 1, p. 7.

start to finish, it acquired new sound characteristics due to entrances of other voices. The bass part goes down up to the register *profundo*, on an instant, like a fleeting flashes-accents (measures 17–20). The harmony of *Shchedryk* is rich and innovative according to thin gradation of sounds. Leaving the melody unchanged, Leontovych applied a rich harmonic arsenal of polyphonic, textural and timbre means to create an individual image of the song.

The very structure of a song is a repeated repetition of one basic motif. Four measures melody consists with four repetitions of the same phrase within the tonal plan *g-moll – c-moll – g-moll*. The well-known Czech musicologist and music critic Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) was astonished at the way how Leontovych created an artistic work of „unparalleled internal mobility from just one poor motif“.²⁰

In general, *Shchedryk* as a melodic positive energy song differs from other Christmas songs, because it is very short and written in a minor key. Besides piece should be performed at a very high tempo, the words must be pronounced extremely quickly, it requires clear diction and articulation of choristers. At the same time, performers of *Shchedryk* should create a sense of lightness and transparency, underlining sudden dynamic accents on the first syllable: Щé-(дрик), щé-(дрівочка), прй́-(летіла), лá-(стівочка) etc., and refined dynamic waves of *accelerando – allargando*, using chain breathing. All these dynamic micro-shades should provide the interpretation of *Shchedryk* feeling of special lyric and agitated impression, create an unreal and fantastic picture of vision of the „Night before Christmas“, that appeared on an instant and disappeared. A feature of the piece is increasing dynamics.

Cultural code of *Shchedryk* can be decoded by listener variously: as a rhythm of the heart, as a blowing of wind, as a metaphorical knocking at the door, as a magic pulse of time from the past to the future.

Shchedryk was performed in the USA in its original form until 1936. It turned to be famous all over the world after 20 years of its premiere under adaptation of distinguished choral director Peter J. Wilhousky (Ukrainian: Петро Йосипович Вільховський) (1902–1978) in 1936:

That year an English remake, musically faithful to the original, made its entrance...²¹ Such is the destiny of one godly bird emerging from an ancient creed, a destiny and fortune of a swallow whose chatter became music for millions.²²

²⁰ Zdeněk Nejedlý, „Ukrajinska republikanska kapela“, in: *Nakladem Ukrajinskeho vydavatel'skeho družstva „Čas“ Kyjev, Praha*; Knihtiskarna „Politiky“ v Praze, 1920, 67 pp.

²¹ Roman Sawycky, „Carol of the bells“, in: *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Edition Svoboda), December 19, 1976, No. 49 (250), Vol. LXXXIII, Part 1, p. 7.

²² Roman Sawycky, „Carol of the bells“, in: *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Edition Svoboda), December 26, 1976, No. 50 (255), Vol. LXXXIII, Part 2, p. 7.



Fig. 5: Peter J. Wilhousky (1902–1978)

Peter J. Wilhousky was an American composer of Ukrainian (Carpatho-Rusyn) origin, arranger, lyricist, educator, choral conductor of Ukrainian ethnic extraction. Educated in New York, Wilhousky during the 1940's prepared the choruses for famous Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini (1867–1957) in his now historic NBC Symphony broadcasts.²³ Being a choral director and composer, arranger, he would later become a music teacher and, also taught for many years at the world renowned Julliard School of Music within the Lincoln Center complex in New York City. In 1940 Wilhousky was appointed as an Assistant and

later Director of Music for the New York City School System and conductor of the New York All-City High School Chorus. Wilhousky was awarded an honorary doctorate from the New York College of Music, the Handel Medalion and the American Choral Directors Association award in 1975.²⁴

In Wilhousky's English version Leontovych's piece has reached its zenith and gained worldwide popularity. Wilhousky wrote to *Shchedryk* the English language metrically and phonetically close-fitting lyrics beginning with *Hark! How the bells* and titled it as a *Carol of the Bells*, thus bypassing the swallow's message. The English text is not a translation of the original Ukrainian. It lost hemiola, a shifting of accents within each measure between 6/8 and 3/4 and back again which is in the original Ukrainian text. Besides, in English textual version the emphasis of syllables and agogics had been significantly changed.

Wilhousky copyrighted piece and published it in 1936 in New York in a publishing company *Carl Fisher Music Inc.*, though the work has been published earlier in 1918 in the collection „From the folk song“²⁵ in Ukraine: „The 1936 Fischer printing made 'Carol of the Bells' into a song 'heard round the world' and from that point the carol rang with a merry life of its own with more rearrangements and recordings than any other work of Ukrainian origin“.²⁶ In American edition *Carol of the Bells* was marked as the Ukrainian carol, music by Mykola D. Leontovych, text and arrangement by Peter J. Wilhousky.²⁷

²³ Lawrence Chvany, *Carpatho-Rusyn American: Peter J. Wilhousky (1902–1978)*, Vol. VI, 1983, No. 4.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Valentyna Kuzyk „'Shchedryk' analiz-stretta“ [„Shchedryk“ analysis-stretta], in: *Narodna tvorchist ta etnoloigiya* [Folk Art and Ethnology], Kyiv, No 1, 2013, p. 45.

²⁶ Roman Sawycky, „Carol of the bells“, in: *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Edition Svoboda), December 26, 1976, No. 50 (255), Vol. LXXXIII, Part 2, p. 7.

²⁷ Dr. Zenon Nizankowsky, „The origin of the Ukrainian Carol of the bells“, in: *Visti* [News], USA: Saint Paul, Minnesota 1970, Part 1 (32), p. 19.

Wilhousky's arrangement for the first time was executed by school choir under his direction and choir of Walter Damrosch (1862–1950), a German-born American conductor and composer. In the late 1930s, several choirs that under Wilhousky direction began performing his Anglicized arrangement during the Christmas holiday season and his version gradually has become the staple of the holiday repertoire. Choirs of other schools and colleges took the piece and started to perform it in all states of America.

At request of musicologist, bibliographer, graduate of *The Ukrainian Music Institute of America* Prof. Roman Sawycky Jr. (*1938), P. Wilhousky described the origin of the *Carol of the Bells* and the above information in a letter from Westport, Connecticut, dated December 28, 1973, posted in column „Sounds and Views“ in „The Ukrainian Weekly“ (No. 49 (250) Part 1; No. 50 (255), Part 2):

I had heard it (i.e. *Shchedryk*) sung by a Ukrainian choir and somehow obtained a manuscript copy. At about that time I needed a short number to fill out a program I was asked to do for the Walter Damrosch Music Appreciation Hour with my high school choir. Since the youngsters would not sing in Ukrainian I had to compose a text in English. I discarded the Ukrainian text about 'shchedryk' – (the barnyard fowl) and instead concentrated on the merry tinkle of the bells which I heard in the music... After the broadcast many schools and colleges wrote in asking where they could obtain printed copies of the *Carol of the Bells*. My friends urged me to submit the number to a publisher – which I did – namely G. Schirmer. My manuscript was returned after two months with regrets... A week or two later a salesman from Carl Fischer came to visit me at my school. He said his company would like to have my music in their catalogue and asked if I had any compositions or arrangements they could publish... I took out the rejected manuscript of *Carol of the Bells* and frankly told him how it was received. He took the copy and phoned me the next day that they would print it. Needless to say, it has been a best seller ever since. There was no need to push it – it just grew. My motive was never commercial. I just wanted to introduce good music. You say that the original version is slightly different from the one I used. I should like to see the original some day to note the difference... Incidentally, he (*Arturo Toscanini* – *Z. L.-S.*) did not know the *Carol of the Bells* although he may have heard it later when Bob Shaw's Chorale sang carols outside his home in Riverdale... Complying with his request, I forwarded the original Leontovych version to Mr. Wilhousky and he acknowledged the difference in the finale of his score. New York's Carl Fischer printed „*Carol of the Bells*“ with the subtitle „*Ukrainian Christmas Carol*“. Credits went to M. Leontovych (music) and to Peter J. Wilhousky (arr. and text). The „arr.“ can be explained by the piano or organ part closely derived from Leontovych, designated „for rehearsal only“.²⁸

As Wilhousky told, Leontovych's *Shchedryk* reminded him sounds of rapidly peeling Christmas bells as the messengers of good cheer. In English language lyrics Wilhousky used a legend which held that at the stroke of midnight, when Jesus was born, every bell in the world suddenly began to ring out in his honor, peeling for joy. Besides, in the West bells are considered as one of the main musical attribute of Christmas, as a symbol of gladness and joy, almost all popular Christmas works contain the sounding of campanelli. As

²⁸ Roman Sawycky, „Carol of the bells“, in: *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Edition Svoboda), December 26, 1976, No. 50 (255), Vol. LXXXIII, Part 2, p. 7.

the title implies, *Carol of the Bells* tells of the „sweet silver bells“ pealing together merrily in unison:

Hark! How the bells
Sweet silver bells
All seem to say
Throw cares away

Oh, how they pound
Raising the sound
O'er hill and dale
Telling the tale

Christmas is here
Bringing good cheer
To young and old
Meek and the bold

Gaily they ring
while people sing
Songs of good cheer
Christmas is here

Ding dong ding dong
That is their song
With joyful ring
All caroling

Merry, merry, merry,
Merry, merry, merry,
merry Christmas
merry Christmas

One seems to hear
Words of good cheer
From everywhere
Filling the air

On on they send
On without end
Their joyful tone
To every home
Ding, dong, ding, dong..... dong!

Carol of the Bells began associated with Christmas because of its new lyrics, caroling, references to silver bells and the line „merry, merry Christmas“. The rendition of *Carol of the Bells* reflects caroling when new groups of singers come in. It is sung quietly in the beginning, grows louder and ever louder as each voice adds to the tintinnabulation, and finally dies away to a *pianissimo* as the pealing gradually ceases. The most popular are song's opening lines „Hark! How the bells, sweet silver bells“ coupled with the countermelody „ding, dong, ding, dong“.

Since then *Carol of the Bells* that derived from the Ukrainian choral work *Shchedryk* has been performed and sung during the Christmastime in the USA. Its initial popularity furthered American recordings of the song on the radio in the 1940s by various artists. Its recognition promoted using the catchy tune of carol by French *a cappella* group „The Swingle Singers“ in a series of TV advertisement for champagne with an idea that champagne was as sparkling and tasteful as the music.²⁹

Besides, the haunting melody of Leontovych's *Shchedryk* had been borrowed in three other American carols. In 1947 Minna Louise Hohman composed more „Nativity-based“ lyrics that resemble the above set. This popular English version of the song is commonly known as *Ring, Christmas Bells*. It

²⁹ William Emmett Studwell, *The Christmas Carol Reader*, New York/London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2011, p. 164.

was published in 1954 in the publishing house *Pro Art Publications of Westbury* under edition of Walter Ehret. It describes silver bells intoning holiday cheer into every home:

Ring, Christmas bells,
merrily ring,
Tell all the world
Jesus is King.

Come all ye people,
Join in the singing,
Repeat the story,
Told by the ringing.

Loudly proclaim
With one accord
The happy tale,
Welcome the Lord!

Ring, Christmas bells,
Tell the glad news
Of Jesus birth.

Ring, Christmas bells,
Sound far and near,
The birthday of Jesus is here.

Loudly proclaim,
With one accord,
The happy tale,
Welcome the Lord!

Herald the news,
To old and young,
In ev'ry tongue.

Ring, Christmas bells
Merrily ring,
Tell all the world,
Jesus is King!

Ring, Christmas bells,
Toll loud and long,
Your message sweet,
Peel and prolong.

In 1957 and in 1972 were published lesser-known anonymous lyrics *Come, Dance and Sing* and another *Carol of the Bells*. Wilhousky's *Carol of the Bells* is distinguished from the later one by the first line *Hark! How the bells, sweet silver bells!* The second *Carol of the Bells* starts with *Hark to the bells, Hark to the bells*. Except Wilhousky other English text to *Shchedryk* was created by M.E. Bovee in 1951 „*Ring silver bells*“.

The song serves as the backdrop of American radio and television during the Christmas holidays. W. Studwell in „*The Christmas Carol Reader*“ marked that „this multiple usage of Leontovich's music for four carols as well as for a variety of other purposes is sound testimony to its quality and popular appeal“³⁰ still the appeal to it lies in its choral rendition.

This masterpiece has been repeatedly re-printed,³¹ recorded over a lot of versions and re-arranged many times for different vocal and instrumental combinations in a variety of formats and styles, including organ and symphonic orchestra, glee clubs, chimes, the electronic Moog machine etc. It was covered by artists and groups of many genres: classical, jazz, country music, rock, metal, pop etc. In Internet are available hundreds recordings of this

³⁰ Ibid..

³¹ In most of printings the Ukrainian origin of carol is noted, though in some is given the erroneous data on its identity.

song with no end of beautiful variations on its iconic four-note loop. For example, in 2012 five NBA Basketball's biggest superstars (Dwyane Wade, Carmelo Anthony, Dwight Howard, Russell Westbrook and Joe Johnson) performed the piece by blows of balls (*NBA Christmas Carol: Dribbling the Bells*).

American recordings of this Christmas piece in English began to surface in the 1940s by such notable groups as Fred Warring and Pennsylvanians, the Roger Wagner Chorale, the Robert Shaw Chorale, Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Phil Spitalny's „Hour of Charm All-Girl Orchestra“. Since then *Carol of the Bells* began to occupy a prominent place in the Christmas albums of all the most popular American singers.

The song has been notably renditioned and recorded by „The Voices of Christmas“ (1955), the Swingle Singers (album „Christmastime“, 1968), Johnny Mathis (album „Christmas With Johnny Mathis“, 1972), John Fahey (on Tahoma Records' 1975 album „Christmas with John Fahey“, Vol. II, 1975), Richard Carpenter (piano, in an orchestral version arranged by Peter Knight on the album „Carpenters Christmas Portrait“ 1978), George Winston (solo piano on „December CD album“, acknowledging piece as a traditional Ukrainian song, 1980), Kenny Rogers („Christmas album“, 1981, re-released in 1985), David Benoit (a jazz version on album „Christmastime“, 1983), Chip Davis and his band Mannheim Steamroller (on album „A Fresh Aire Christmas“, 1988), George Winston (solo piano on his album/CD in the late 1980s, acknowledging it as a traditional Ukrainian song), Wynton Marsalis (1990), David Foster (version for the NBC Christmas special „David Foster's Christmas Album“ to promote „The Christmas Album“, 1993), Charles Aznavour, Sissel Kyrkjebø, and Plácido Domingo (the Christmas concert in Vienna, 1994), John Tesh (charted the song Billboard Adult Contemporary survey, 1997), Al Di Meola (Christmas album „Winter Nights“, 1999), Destiny's Child (a slow-paced version under the name „Opera of the Bells“, 2001), The Calling (on the compilation „Holiday Sounds of the Season“, 2002), Moe (band) (a version on their „Season's Greetings from Moe“ (2003), Gandalf Murphy and the Slambovian Circus of Dreams (song „Slambovia“ on their live „Bootleg Series“, album „The Christmas Show“, 2004), Barenaked Ladies (the album „Barenaked for the Holidays“, 2004), Nox Arcana (album „Winter's Knight“, 2005), Krypteria (a piano version in the album „In Medias Res“ 2005), Moya Brennan (a version for Celtic-themed Christmas album „An Irish Christmas“, 2006), Celtic Woman (Christmas celebration at the Helix Center in Dublin, Ireland, 2006), Jennifer Hudson (Elmo's Christmas Countdown, 2007), ManSound (album „Joy to the World“ (2005), „До Різдва“, 2007), Esthetic Education (under the title „Shedry Schedryk“ in the album „Werewolf“, 2007), Emmy Rossum (electronically enhanced pop version of the song on album of Christmas songs, 2007), Hayley Westenra (album „Winter

Magic“, 2009), Family Force 5 (album „Christmas Pageant“, 2009), Enter Shikari („Christmas Eve show“ in Hatfield, UK; recording on „Live from Planet Earth“, 2010), Jessica Simpson (Christmas album „Happy Christmas“, 2010), Oleh Skrypka and Vopli Vidoplasova (album „Щедрик“, 2010), Pink Martini (album „Joy to the World“, 2010), Libera (album „Libera: The Christmas Album“, 2011), August Burns Red (Christmas Show, 2012), Pentatonix (Christmas album PTXmas „That’s Christmas to Me“, 2012), Ukrainian rock-band ROCK-H (album „In Vinko Veritas“, 2012), Tectum (album „Digital“, 2012), Marillion (album „A Collection Of Recycled Gifts“, 2013), David Hicken (album „Carols of Christmas (Amazing Piano Solo)“, 2013), The Piano Guys (for 12 cellos, album „A Family Christmas“, 2013, re-released in 2014), LeAnn Rimes (album „One Christmas“, 2014), Orion’s Reign (album „Carol of the Bells (Symphonic Heavy Metal Version)“, 2014) and others. One of the most popular renditions of *Carol of the Bells* is Savatage and Metallica’s (Trans-Siberian Orchestra) (album „Christmas Eve/Sarajevo 12/24 and other Stories“, 1996), an instrumental medley of the song in electric guitar adaptation, that was played on many radio stations.

The version with Minna Louise Hohman’s lyrics *Ring, Christmas Bells* (1947) has been recorded by the Ray Conniff Singers (album „We wish you a merry Christmas“, 1962), Andy Williams (albums „The Andy Williams Christmas Album“ (1963), „Merry Christmas“ (1965), „Christmas Present“ (1974), „Andy Williams Live: Christmas Treasures“ (2001)) and Julie Andrews („The Bells of Christmas“ with „The Treorchy Male Choir“, 1965; „Julies Christmas Special“, 1973 etc.).

Carol of the Bells was recorded under the leadership of such famous conductors as *David Randolph* (album „Christmas Carols. Randolph Singers“, 1952); *Leonard Bernstein* (the New York Philharmonic with the *Mormon Tabernacle Choir*, album „The Joy of Christmas“, 1963; it is the only Christmas album ever recorded by L. Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic); *Andre Kostelanetz* (on Christmas albums „Joy To The World“, 1960), „Wonderland of Christmas“ (1963), and „Wishing you a Merry Christmas“, 1965); *Robert Shaw* (albums „Christmas Hymns and Carols“ (1958), „A Festival of Carols“ (1987), „Christmas with The Robert Shaw Chorale“ (1994); *Eugene Ormandy* (The Philadelphia Orchestra Chorus, 1981); *Arthur Fiedler* (album „A Christmas Festival with Arthur Fiedler and The Boston Pops“, 1994); *Carmen Dragon* (album „It’s Christmas Night“, Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra), *Keith Lockhart* (album „Holiday pops“, the Boston Pops Orchestra, 1998) and others etc.

The adapted *Shchedryk* in its Anglicized arrangement as a popular Christmas tune has been often used in the soundtracks for films (The Santa Claus (1994); Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban; Home Alone; Home Alone 2: Lost in New York; Melody for a Street Organ (2009) etc.), television shows,

advertisement (Dell Latitude Laptops for GPS-navigator Garmin, 2006), parodies (single of Guster *Carol of the Meows* (2004), where the lyrics simulate cat noises; The Muppets, here a large bell falling on the frenetic Beaker (2009)), TV serials (South Park; The Simpsons; Family Guy; Saturday Night Live; The Mentalist; West Wing; Community; Eureka), shows (Radio City Christmas show in NY), Internet meme (Ding Fries are Done). An American composer John Williams (1932) often associated with film music used *Carol of the Bells* as a haunting backdrop in the 1990 Christmas classic *Home Alone* (that same year the song was released by Sony Music Entertainment on the *Home Alone* soundtrack) and made his own version of it.

Thus the song that would later become *Carol of the Bells* began its life as a Ukrainian folk chant titled *Shchedryk*. Melody of *Carol of the Bells* arrived in America together with the Ukrainian immigrants. Surprisingly, that music material of arrangement of *Shchedryk* by Leontovych is not under copyright and roams free in the public domain space all over the world. At the same time, Wilhousky's well-known title *Carol of the Bells* and text remain under copyright. Besides in Ukraine Leontovych's *Shchedryk* is performed mainly by professional choirs,³² it is very rare in the repertoire of modern folk carollers. In 2013 in Lviv *Shchedryk* was performed by 20 choirs (about 600 singers)!

At present *Shchedryk* can be regarded as the largest Ukrainian contribution to the world musical culture. *Shchedryk* can be also considered not only as the „visiting-card“ of Leontovych's creativity but as a concentrate of the semantic field of the whole Ukrainian choral culture. It is the phenomenon how a simple folk song performed in a remote Ukrainian village became a super popular hit, a „world musical bestseller“ (after H. Karas), one of the most memorable festive tunes. At the same time, Leontovych's *Shchedryk* in the adaptation of Wilhousky at the beginning of the XXIst century may be perceived as a song-cosmopolitan, a „super holiday hit“, personification of the elevated spirit of Christmas all around the world. The best confirmation of it is the song's ubiquitous presence during the Christmastime.

³² <http://www.parafia.org.ua/piece/schedryk-7/>